



Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Summary

Requesting Agency:	New Jersey Division of Family Development
Point of Contact (POC):	Audrea F. Dunham, PhD, Coordinator, Transitional Services
POC Telephone No.:	609-631-4534
POC E-Mail Address:	Audrea.dunham@dhs.state.nj.us
TA Event:	134
TA Requested:	The New Jersey Division of Family Development requested the assistance of the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network in planning and conducting a 1½ day roundtable to better prepare case managers to screen clients for learning disabilities.
TA Goal:	<p>There were three primary goals of the meeting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. increase the understanding of learning disabilities and how they impact TANF recipients;2. increase the understanding of the tools and protocols used to evaluate their clients' strengths and weaknesses and the extent to which they may require additional resources; and3. increase the collaboration with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to better meet the needs of TANF recipients with learning disabilities.
TA Format:	Roundtable
Sample Evaluations:	<p>A preliminary examination of the session evaluations suggest that participants thought that the Roundtable was both successful and helpful in providing information about learning disabilities, how they affect the TANF population and how to screen, assess and accommodate them.</p> <p>Selected highlights from the evaluations include:</p> <p>"More clearly defined LD for me. What LD is vs. what it is not. Especially significant is emphasis on different learning methods."</p> <p>"The process is effective in getting actions plans into operation to help clients and addressing challenges."</p> <p>"Plan to share and empower staff with the understanding and sensitivity in referring participants to proper entity for services."</p> <p>"Clarification of LD and the possibilities of appropriate services which New Jersey can begin as shown in other areas of the US."</p> <p>"I identified and made contact with people who can assist me in advocating on a customer <u>and</u> agency or department level."</p>

Analysis:

Fifty-four million Americans, one in five, are living with at least one disability; about twenty-eight million are learning disabled. Approximately twenty-five to forty percent of TANF and Safety Net participants have learning disabilities. These individuals may have reading, writing or mathematical difficulties; lack organizational skills and executive functioning; and are likely to experience high unemployment or underemployment, all of which further hinder their ability to be successful and self-sufficient.

The Roundtable event in New Jersey was attended by Federal agency staff, representatives from the New Jersey Departments of Social Services and Vocational Rehabilitation, One Stop Centers and local community agencies. Overall, the Roundtable was designed to highlight the importance of screening for learning disabilities and accommodating them when serving TANF clients. This was done through education, peer-to-peer learning and the sharing of promising practices. Helpful tools were provided to participants for screening, assessing and interviewing clients, as well as to facilitate the development of local and regional action plans for immediate implementation.

The Roundtable included comprehensive information sharing, as participants were offered presentations on understanding and screening for learning disabilities. Basic information describing learning disabilities and how they impact the WorkFirst Environment was provided. Models for integrating people with learning disabilities into the workforce, as well as the legal and policy requirements relative to accommodating the special needs of TANF clients were discussed. In addition, the New Jersey Department of Vocational Rehabilitation presented information on their referral process and the services they provide to TANF and other clients. The vital importance of community and inter-agency partnerships were highlighted as counties and localities move forward to integrate learning disabilities into their individual service plans.

Additionally, networking sessions, interactive exercises and case studies afforded participants the opportunity to learn first hand how to conduct screenings and assessments, as well as how to best implement the necessary accommodations for TANF clients with learning disabilities.

Overall, participants, speakers, and facilitators agreed that the Roundtable was a success in assisting TANF service providers in understanding and supporting clients with learning disabilities.

Watch for a full report on this event in the coming weeks.

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